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ABSTRACT

Literature Circles are a great way to supplement a reading program in a literature-based classroom. In this lesson plan, students create and answer comprehension questions, discover new vocabulary, and examine elements of literature. The students feel ownership in Literature Circles, because they are responsible for the meeting. Any genre of literature can be used. During two 45-minute sessions, students will: discuss the meanings of new words encountered in independent and group activities; use a variety of resources to clarify meanings of unfamiliar words; define unfamiliar vocabulary; make predictions about text events before and during reading, and confirm, modify, or reject predictions after reading; use evidence in text to form questions and verify predictions; demonstrate an accurate understanding of information in the text by focusing on the key ideas presented explicitly or implicitly and linking them to previous experience and knowledge; ask questions to clarify understanding; use information to generate and respond to questions that reflect higher level thinking skills; formulate relevant and focused questions; retell information from a text; paraphrase/summarize text according to text structure; respond in an appropriate manner to question and discussion with relevant and focused comments; interpret figurative language; identify literary elements in text; and demonstrate the ability to listen for different purposes. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A self-reflection page and worksheets for the checker, discussion director, literary luminary, and vocabulary enricher of each group are attached. (PM)

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Literature Circles: Getting Started

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Grade Band

3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

Two 45-minute sessions

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Overview

In a literature-based classroom, it is sometimes difficult to find interesting ways to conduct literature groups. Often with my higher leveled groups, we will use Literature Circles. We often begin by selecting a book together—possibly from a particular genre, or tying into a Social Studies/Science unit. I will then introduce the four jobs in the Literature Circles: Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Vocabulary Enricher, and Checker. Then, to model the process, we will do each of the jobs together once before the students are responsible for them on their own. The jobs then rotate as the students read their book. This model nicely allows self-assessment, as well as group assessment.

From Theory to Practice

Daniels, Harvey, and Marilyn Bizar. 1998. *Methods That Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Fountas, Irene C., and Gay Su Pinnell. 2001. *Guiding Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English. 1996. *Standards for the English Language Arts*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

- "Students should develop an awareness of their own participation in various literary communities and their roles within them ... Peer and cultural communities exert a powerful although sometimes subtle influence on student's language" (44).
- "By developing awareness of their own roles within different literacy communities, students can see how language usage varies across different contexts and audiences" (44).
- "It is essential that students acquire a wide range of abilities and tools for raising questions, investigating concerns, and solving problems" (38).

Hill, Bonnie Campbell, Nancy J. Johnson, Katherine L. Schlick Noe. (Eds.). 1995. *Literature Circles and Response*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

- "Literature circles are discussion groups in which children meet regularly to talk about books... Literature circles contain several common threads. Groups are determined by book choices; literature circles are heterogeneous and include a range of interests and abilities" (2).

Student Objectives

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Students will

- discuss the meanings of new words encountered in independent and group activities.
- use a variety of resources to clarify meanings of unfamiliar words.
- define unfamiliar vocabulary.
- make predictions about text events before and during reading, and confirm, modify, or reject predictions after reading.
- use evidence in text to form questions and verify predictions.
- demonstrate an accurate understanding of information in the text by focusing on the key ideas presented explicitly or implicitly and linking then to previous experience and knowledge.
- ask questions to clarify understanding.
- use information to generate and respond to questions that reflect higher level thinking skills.
- formulate relevant and focused questions.
- retell information from a text.
- paraphrase/summarize text according to text structure.
- respond in an appropriate manner to question and discussion with relevant and focused comments.
- interpret figurative language.
- identify literary elements in text (e.g., simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc.).
- demonstrate the ability to listen for different purposes.

Resources

- Self-Reflection Worksheet
- Checker Worksheet
- Discussion Director Worksheet
- Literary Luminary Worksheet
- Vocabulary Enricher Handout
- Templates for Students Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

1. Multiple copies of literature books
2. Templates for the students

Prepration

1. Teacher should have a working knowledge of Literature Circles.
2. Teacher should read and select books.

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3. Divide students into groups of 4 to 6, depending on class size.
4. Prepare templates for students.
5. Create a schedule for reading and meeting.

Defining Literature Circles

1. Students choose their own reading materials.
2. Small temporary groups are formed, based upon book choice.
3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.
5. Students use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
6. Discussion topics come from the students.
7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
8. In newly forming groups, students may play a rotating assortment of task roles.
9. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.
10. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation .
11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading choices.

Instructions and Activities

1. Begin by selecting books that the students will be using for Literature Circles. According to Hill, Johnson and Noe (1995), it is best to choose books that arouse emotions, are well-written, and are meaningful (113).
2. Divide students into groups of 4 to 6, depending on class size.
3. Discuss the purpose and rationale of Literature Circles.
4. Explore the four jobs of Literature Circles as a class.

    Discussion Director
    - creates questions to increase comprehension
    - asks who, what, why, when, where, how, and what if

    Vocabulary Enricher
    - clarifies word meanings and pronunciations
    - uses research resources

    Literary Luminary
    - guides oral reading for a purpose
    - examines figurative language, parts of speech, and vivid descriptions

    Checker
    - checks for completion of assignments
    - evaluates participation
    - helps monitor discussion for equal participation

5. I teach the students how to complete the jobs by choosing a short book, with at least 8 chapters.
    - Read Chapter 1 together. Teacher acts as Discussion Director.
    - Read Chapter 2 together. Students have guided practice being Discussion Director.
    - Read Chapter 3 together. Teacher acts as Vocabulary Enricher.
    - Read Chapter 4 together. Students have guided practice being Vocabulary Enricher.
    - Read Chapter 5 together. Teacher acts as Literary Luminary.
    - Read Chapter 6 together. Students have guided practice being Literary Luminary.
    - Read Chapter 7 together. Teacher acts as Checker.
    - Read Chapter 8 together. Students have guided practice being Checker.

6. The students should then be ready to create and participate in their own Literature Circles.
7. Teacher should create a schedule for implementing Literature Circles. Students need time to read, and complete their assignments.
8. On meeting day, teacher should float among groups taking anecdotal data.
9. When groups are done meeting that day, jobs should be rotated.
10. Teacher can administer assessments to evaluate the student's attitudes and participation.

As a teacher, I found it easiest to have all of the Literature Circles meet on the same day. That way, the teacher can float around to each of the groups, monitoring their meeting process.

Web Resources

Templates for Students
http://www.cmi.k12.il.us/~finkli/litcircles.htm
Teacher-created templates for student handouts for Literature Circles.

Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Teacher observation and anecdotal notes based on group discussions.
2. Conferences and interviews.
3. Written student response.
4. Student self-assessment to measure disposition using Self-Reflection Worksheet.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

9 - Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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read·write·think

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Self-Reflection: Taking Part in a Group

	Yes	Unsure	No
1. Did I understand what my role was in the group?			
2. Did I complete my task to the best of my ability?			
3. Did I have my turn speaking?			
4. Did I let others have a turn at speaking?			
5. Did I listen while others were speaking?			
6. Did I offer to help when it was needed?			
7. Did I enjoy taking part in the group work?			
8. Did I enjoy working with the others in my group?			

What are three things that you enjoyed about your role in the group?

What is something that you want to do differently next time?

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Name _____ Book _____

CHECKER -- checks for completion of assignments, evaluates participation, helps monitor discussion for equal participation

PARTICIPATION: Ã given for each answer
+ given for other contributions and cooperative behaviors
- given for interrupting, distracting, goofing off

READ ASSIGNMENT: + = appears to have read
- = little if any proof

EVALUATION OF OUR GROUP: _____

_____

_____

_____

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Name _____ Book _____

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR: asks questions to increase comprehension

1. Why do you think the author had _____

_____ happen in the story?

2. How is _____ alike/different from

_____ ?

3. If you had been _____, how would you have

_____ ?

4. How did you feel about _____ ?

5. What do you think caused _____ ?

6. How would the story have been changed if the author had not let _____ happen?

7. Tell a short summary of _____ .

8. Predict: _____

_____ .

9. Do you think _____

happening will be important later on?

Why do you think so?

10. How?

11. Why?

Name _____ Book _____

LITERARY LUMINARY: guides oral reading for a purpose

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Name _____ Book _____

VOCABULARY ENRICHER: clarifies word meanings and pronunciations

- look up each word in the dictionary
- write how the word was used in the story
- find the correct definition for the word

PLANS:

1. Group finds word and figures out meaning from context
2. Group chooses correct definition from dictionary
3. Group uses thesaurus to find a synonym to substitute in sentence

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